

Utah County Birders Newsletter

April 2014

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APRIL MEETING:

Thursday, April 10th, 2014 - 7:00 PM

Eric Peterson will give a presentation on his **2013 quest for 500 Species**.

Meet at 7:00 pm at the Orem Public Library Media Room (Downstairs in the main wing). Orem Library - 58 North State Street, Orem.

FIELD TRIPS:

5 April, 2014 (Sat): Tooele County - Leader Bryan Shirley - Meet at 7 AM at Orem Center St. Park and Ride (7:15ish we will swing by the Pioneer Xing park and ride). We will bird At Fitzgerald WMA, then continue on to Clover & Rush Lakes, through Tooele and then home via SLC. We should be back in the early afternoon.

12 April, 2014 (Sat): Box Elder, Cache and/or Rich Counties - 7am-mid afternoon. Leader Keeli Marvel - Meet at the Pioneer Crossing Park and Ride (AF Main Street Exit) We will bird Box Elder, Cache, and Rich Counties (If time permits all three). We will start the trip off by heading to Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. From there we'll head east and then south to pick up Cache, and if time permits, Rich county birds for our 2014 birding challenge.

21 April, 2014 (Mon): Morgan & Summit Counties - Leader Bryan Shirley - We will start the morning at the Henefer Sage Grouse Lek, then bird around East Canyon Reservoir. Afterwards we will bird Echo and Rockport Reservoirs as we work our way back toward Provo. Leave the parking area behind Will's Pit Stop at the mouth of Provo Canyon at 5 AM sharp.

May - Lytle Ranch

Information for our May field trip to Southern Utah:

Trip is tentatively planned for May 2nd-4th. The bunkhouse at Lytle will sleep 12 women and 12 men and has cooking facilities, so there is plenty of room In order to reserve space at **Lytle Ranch for the night of May 2nd I need to get a count of people ASAP who would be interested in attending**. We may choose to spend the second night in Cedar City in order to bird Iron and Beaver counties on the way home. Please email, call or text keeli at keeli.marvel@gmail.com or 801-602-9566 with questions or if you think you might be interested in attending. We will plan on hitting at least 3 counties on this trip for our 2014 birder challenge.

We are actively recruiting people to lead local half-day field trips, any time, any place. If you would like to lead a field trip or if you have any ideas for this year's field trips, please contact Bryan Shirley at - bt_shirley@hotmail.com

Captain's Log

by Keeli Marvel

April Captain's Log: **Bird adaptation for staying on the ground.**

A couple of months ago I wrote about characteristics of birds that make them uniquely adapted for flight. In this month's article, I will discuss those that have lost the ability to fly – and some of the interesting adaptations they have developed instead. Flying is to birds like water is to fish, right? Not for these guys. Flightless birds are a unique and diverse bunch. One would think that as a bird, losing the ability to fly would greatly reduce your options in life, but as it turns out, there are a few benefits. Flightless birds no longer require the massive energy investments needed to develop and carry around the enormous flight muscles, wing structure, or keeled bone structure required for flight, nor do they have to constantly feed to fuel those muscles in flight. This also has the added benefit of allowing some species to be very very large- larger than they could ever be if they could fly. (No- ostriches, I'm not calling you fat. You're just big boned, I promise.) As it turns out, however, large herbivorous birds still have to consume a great deal because of the lower caloric content of their plant-based diets. Many of them, like the ostriches, have evolved large intestines to deal with the large amount of plant matter they consume.

If life is so good being a bird on the ground, then you may ask, why did birds take to the sky in the first place? Extinct flightless species like the Dodo, the Great Auk, the Moa, and the Elephant Bird could probably answer that for you. Being tied to the ground makes you much more vulnerable to being eaten, especially when humans and human-introduced predators such as rats and cats become involved.

Flightless birds that have successfully survived extinction-this long at least- have evolved a number of defenses to counter the threat of predators on land. Some, like penguins, have evolved as very strong swimmers and virtually fly through the water instead of the air. However, awkwardness out of the water still makes them vulnerable to predators on land. Most penguin species are fortunate to occupy some of the more remote and less populated places still left on the earth, so they've got that going for them as well.

Another group of flightless birds called the Ratites include Ostriches in Africa, the Emus in Australia, Cassowaries of Australia and New Guinea, the Rheas of South American, and the Kiwis of New Zealand. These species (with the exception of the kiwis) are all larger bodied birds that have evolved strong powerful legs and are very fast runners adept at using their legs or their feet for defense or escape. Ostriches and Emus can reach speeds of 30-40 mph. In many places ostriches and emus have been domesticated, and are commercially farmed for their feathers, meat and skin. Can you imagine herding a flock of ostriches down the road?

Unlike their larger cousins, the Kiwis of New Zealand are much smaller nocturnal flightless birds that have committed 100% to the flightless gig and have tiny hidden vestigial wings (no longer functional in any way shape or form) and an obvious lack of any external tail. They have the unique distinction of laying the largest egg in proportion to body size of any bird, laying an egg up to one quarter of the female's weight. Not that comparing live birth to egg laying makes sense on any level, but that'd be like a smallish 120lb woman giving birth to a 30lb baby! Carrying around that kind of egg weight is clearly not something that would ever be sustainable in a flighted bird. The kiwis, unfortunately, are threatened or endangered across most of its distribution due mostly to loss of habitat and introduction of human-introduced mammalian predators.

Well that pretty much sums up the flightless birds for this month. Just a word of warning, if you meet a cassowary in the forests of New Guinea, you might want to give it some room. Those talons aren't just for show.

Information for this article was provided by the Firefly Encyclopedia of Birds and some limited help from Wikipedia.

Happy birding!
Keeli Marvel

Bird of the Month

American Avocet

Recurvirostra americana

by Sheryl Serrano

When people ask me “What’s your favorite bird?” my answer is usually “The one I’m looking at”. However, when push comes to shove, I would have to say my favorite, at least at one of my top 10, is the American Avocet. I remember the first time I saw one. It was at Lindon Boat Harbor. As soon as I saw that cute thin upturned bill, I was hooked. I love their cinnamon colored heads, that long, thin, upturned bill, the striking black and white pattern of their wings and backs and the fact that they are easy to identify.



photo by Jack Binch

Enough reminiscing. Let’s get down to facts. The American Avocet is about 18 inches with a wing span of 32 inches. Its structure is long legs and neck with a chunky body, small head and upturned bill. As mentioned, they have a bold black and white pattern on the wings and back and cinnamon colored head and neck, which turns gray in winter. The Avocets walk steadily through shallow water swishing their bills from side to side to feed.

The call of the American Avocet is a high bleet, higher and more emphatic when alarmed. (That’s kinda cute too!)

The American Avocet is common through the West and South, but scarce in the Northeast. They are an intermediate-distance migratory, migrating primarily through the interior. They winter from Northern California to SW Guatemala, Belize and Cuba. The Avocet departs its wintering area mostly in March or early April. We can expect to start seeing them here in Utah mid-April to May. (I saw my FOY on the UCB field trip March 15th @ Chicken Creek, thanks for the spot Milt). They will start returning to their wintering grounds anywhere from July to September.

Some interesting facts:

American Avocet will feed day or night. They eat a variety of aquatic invertebrates as well as small fish and seeds.

They have only one brood per season, but will re-nest after a failure.

Both adults will share parenting duties.

Over all a perfect little package. Enjoy this seasons Avocet population. Bleet, Bleet!

(Reference: The Shorebird Guide by Michael O’Brien, Richard Crossley and Kevin Karlson)

If you would like to write an article for the Bird of the Month, please contact Mabelle (new Bird of the Month Coordinator!) - mabelle13johnson@yahoo.com

Field Trip Report

Weber and Davis Counties - 29 March 2014

by Keeli Marvel

We had 25 birders join us on Antelope Island for our field trip on Saturday. The birding along the causeway was pretty slow, but we did see Long-billed Curlews and fly-by views of a Great Blue Heron. On the island we did the northern loop around and up to the visitor's center with a couple of stops. The Chukars were out perched on the rocks, and we spotted a couple of Loggerhead Shrikes at one of the parking areas north of the visitor's center. At the visitor's center highlights included Yellow-headed, Red-winged, and Brewer's Blackbirds, a pair of Say's Phoebes, more Chukars, a lingering White-crowned Sparrow, and some Rock Wrens. We dipped on seeing any Burrowing Owls, but at the hay barn by the bison corrals we got a Barn Owl in the box and a Great-horned Owl perched in the rafters. After most of the people in the group had 29 species on the island the group split up and went several different ways. A couple of parties stayed on the island to continue birding, a couple of cars headed north to Box Elder County, and the car I was in plus one other vehicle headed north into Weber county. We stopped at Ogden Bay (still a mess, but not actively under construction while we were there), where highlights included Green-winged and Cinnamon Teal, Sandhill Cranes calling, a Herring Gull mixed in a large flock of California and Ring-billed Gulls, a Kestrel perched near a Kestrel box and a pair of Ruby-crowned Kinglets in the neighborhood south of Ogden Bay. We finished off our list driving north through Hooper and Warren to where 2150 N crosses First Salt Creek where highlights were three or four Wood Ducks, and some Black-capped Chickadees in the creek along an access road on the northwest side. Complete lists of species are included below.

Antelope Island SP -- Causeway, Davis,
US-UT
Mar 29, 2014 8:30 AM - 11:38 AM
Protocol: Traveling
12.2 mile(s)
Comments: UCB Field Trip - Causeway
and driving loop around visitor center
and buffalo corrals
29 species (+1 other taxa)

Canada Goose 3
Northern Shoveler 10
Lesser Scaup 20
Common Goldeneye 10
Chukar 5
Ring-necked Pheasant 1
Eared Grebe 100
Double-crested Cormorant 5
American White Pelican 1
Great Blue Heron 2
Northern Harrier 1
American Coot 10
Killdeer 2
Long-billed Curlew 4
California Gull 1000
Barn Owl 1
Great Horned Owl 1
Say's Phoebe 2
Loggerhead Shrike 2
Black-billed Magpie 1
American Crow 1
Common Raven 10
Horned Lark 1
swallow sp. 2
European Starling 5
White-crowned Sparrow 1
Red-winged Blackbird 20
Western Meadowlark 30
Yellow-headed Blackbird 4
Brewer's Blackbird 1

Ogden Bay WMA, Weber, US-UT
Mar 29, 2014 11:40 AM - 1:40 PM
Protocol: Traveling
4.5 mile(s)
Comments: UCB Field Trip - Breakoff
group birding Weber Co.
27 species

Canada Goose 2
Mallard 1
Cinnamon Teal 4
Northern Shoveler 10
Green-winged Teal 3
Double-crested Cormorant 5
American White Pelican 2
Great Blue Heron 1
Northern Harrier 1
American Coot 3
Sandhill Crane 2
Killdeer 4
Ring-billed Gull 2
California Gull 50
Herring Gull 1 Confirmed by several
birders. Larger immature bird, pink legs.
Eurasian Collared-Dove 5
American Kestrel 1
Black-billed Magpie 1
Common Raven 3
Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
American Robin 7
Song Sparrow 2
Dark-eyed Junco 1
Red-winged Blackbird 50
Western Meadowlark 1
House Finch 5
House Sparrow 100

Weber County, Weber, US-UT
Mar 29, 2014 1:00 PM - 1:45 PM
Protocol: Traveling
8.0 mile(s)
Comments: Birding west weber county
to finish off our bird list - trip ended at
Weber River
10 species

Wood Duck 3
Great Blue Heron 1
Red-tailed Hawk 1
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 5
Eurasian Collared-Dove 10
Mourning Dove 1
Black-billed Magpie 1
Black-capped Chickadee 2
White-crowned Sparrow 2
House Sparrow 10

View this checklist online at
[http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?
subID=S17696163](http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S17696163)

This report was generated automatically
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Backyard Bird of the Month

March 2014

Jack Binch - Sandy

Best bird of March has to be **California Quail** on my platform feeder that is eight feet high.

Jeff Cooper - Pleasant Grove

California Quail found their way into my yard several times during the month.

Eric Huish - Pleasant Grove

A couple of returning **Turkey Vultures** flew over the house.

Keeli Marvel - Saratoga Springs

Sandhill Cranes heard from inside my kitchen flying over my house. Real excited that my new house is so close to Utah Lake.

Milt Moody - Provo

A **Western Screech-Owl** checked out my owl box for a few days, but probably found better accommodations elsewhere.

Bruce Robinson - West Jordan

Cassin's Finch - First one since 2011 in the yard.

Dennis Shirley - Elk Ridge

A male **Downy Woodpecker** drumming his heart out on 3/26/14.

Alton Thygerson - Provo

Eurasian Collared-Dove - I can't believe that I put this bird as my favorite backyard bird. They have displaced Mourning Doves who once fed in the yard. However, their coo call is peaceful in the mornings. They tend to feed in the late early evening hours.

Report your favorite backyard bird each month to Eric Huish at 801-360-8777 or erichuish@gmail.com

The Utah County Birders Newsletter is now online only/mostly.

We've decided to stop the regular paper mail version of the UCB Newsletter. This will save our club on Printing, Postage and Paper. If you would like an email notice each month when the Newsletter is posted online please send an email to Eric Huish at erichuish@gmail.com or subscribe to the ucynet mailing list. To subscribe to ucynet just send an e-mail to ucynet-subscribe@utahbirds.org

We are willing to print the online version of the newsletter and mail it out to anyone who still wants a paper copy or who doesn't have internet access. If you know of anyone who enjoys the UCB Newsletter but doesn't have internet access please let Eric Huish or Keeli Marvel know and we will make sure they get a copy.